

St. Mary's Church
836 N. Broadway
Southeast corner of North Broadway
and East Kilbourn Avenue
Milwaukee
Milwaukee County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WIS-160

HABS
WIS,
40-MILWA,
9-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HABS
WIS.
40-MILWA
9.

HABS No. WIS-160

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. MARY'S CHURCH

Location: 836 N. Broadway (Southeast corner of North Broadway and East Kilbourn Avenue) Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin.

Present Owner: Roman Catholic Church, Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

Present Occupant: St. Mary's parish, Msgr. Schwab, pastor.

Present Use: Parish Church.

Brief Statement

of Significance: This is the oldest Catholic church in Milwaukee with the exception of a small wooden chapel, dedicated to St. Peter, which stood on or near the present cathedral and is now restored on the grounds of St. Francis's Seminary.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The cornerstone was laid by Bishop Henmi on Whit-Sunday, April 19, 1846. The dedication took place on September 12, 1847.
2. Architect: The architect for the original building is unknown. However, Victor Schulte who was the architect for the 1866 rebuilding of the church may also have been the architect for the original building. He was active in Milwaukee at that time having designed Holy Trinity Church, South Fourth and West Bruce Streets, which was begun in 1849.
3. Notes on alterations and additions: The present form of the church is largely the result of major alterations made in 1866 by Victor Schulte, architect, in which the school which occupied a lower floor was eliminated, the east end of the church enlarged, the main auditorium lowered to ground level, the lower windows bricked-up, and the entire facade enlarged and rebuilt together with the tower.

The original church is described in William George Bruce, Joseph C. Hoffman and Henry C. Schranck's St. Mary's Church Milwaukee, Published for the Church's Diamond Jubilee (Milwaukee: 1921) as being of brick about 50' wide and 100' in

length. It consisted of two stories with the auditorium above and the school below both lighted with a series of side windows. Doric type brick pilasters separated bays and adorned the front. A simple tower in three stages with a gilded dome and cross was placed across the main gable. Access to the auditorium level was by double stairway.

4. Sources

- a. Reference: William George Bruce, The Story of Holy Trinity Parish, 1850-1950 (Milwaukee: n.d.).
- b. Old Views: Illustrations of the original church before the 1866 rebuilding: Bruce, et al., St. Mary's Church, Milwaukee, p. 16; and a lithograph published in 1854 owned by the Research Division of the Milwaukee Association of Commerce.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Classically inspired composition with lofty bell-tower and details (heavy projecting pediments, etc.) strongly suggestive of German inspiration. The material is Milwaukee buff brick, weathered to a dark tone with slight touches of stone trim.
2. Condition of fabric: Well preserved and cared for.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: 54' on N. Broadway x 152' on E. Kilbourn.
2. Foundations: Limestone.
3. Wall construction: Brick masonry with brick pilasters, piers, and other ornament.
4. Chimneys: One for the modern heating system.
5. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: Three main entrance doors of wood in arched openings surmounted by heavy projecting

WIS
NO. 160
9

HABS No. WIS-160

ST. MARY'S CHURCH
page 3

pediments. Doors are double-leaf and paneled. Service doors in the rear give access to sacristies on either side of the sanctuary.

- b. Windows: Tall circle-headed windows filled with colored glass and without tracery light the auditorium on the sides. Tall circular-headed windows with heavy center mullion also appear on front facade and base of the tower over entrance doors. Former windows which lighted school rooms below were bricked up in 1866 and now form brick panels.

6. Roof

- a. Shape: Gabled roof.
 - b. Cornice: Continuous cornice with brick entablature surrounds the building except where broken by tower. The ends of the pavillion-like projections on the rear sacristies have small circular pediments above cornice line. The facade, only, has brick parapets, on either side of the tower mass.
7. Tower: The tower which is entirely of brick and surmounted by a lofty pyramidal spire is in two stages and rises from ground level. The first stage is square and is topped by six small pilasters supporting a deep cornice on brackets. In the second stage the square is chamfered on the corners to form almost an octagon. The spire surmounted by a cross completes the second stage.

C. Technical Description of Interiors

- 1. General Description of Interiors: The interior of the auditorium is executed in plaster with a dropped stamped metal ceiling simulating a shallow vault. Plaster pilasters, friezes, pedestals, and other classical motives decorate the walls. All the plaster work is painted and decorated in fresco which includes simulated architecture in the chancel. The chancel is formed by a large triumphal arch and crowned with a plaster dome. The painting over the high altar is said to have been the gift of King Ludwig I of Bavaria. The interior has had much renovation from time to time particularly after a disastrous fire in 1893.
- 2. Stairways: To choir-loft and belfry, both from the front of the building.

WIS.
45-111-204
9-

HABS No. WIS-160

ST. MARY'S CHURCH
page 4

3. Hardware: Nothing original or remarkable.
4. Lighting: Electric.
5. Heating: Central type, early heating probably by stoves.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Building faces west. Occupies corner site on two busy thoroughfares, little landscaping possible except narrow lawn strip.

Prepared by Henry C. Edwards, Architect
National Park Service - 143 South Third
Street, Phila. 6, Pa. - August 1960